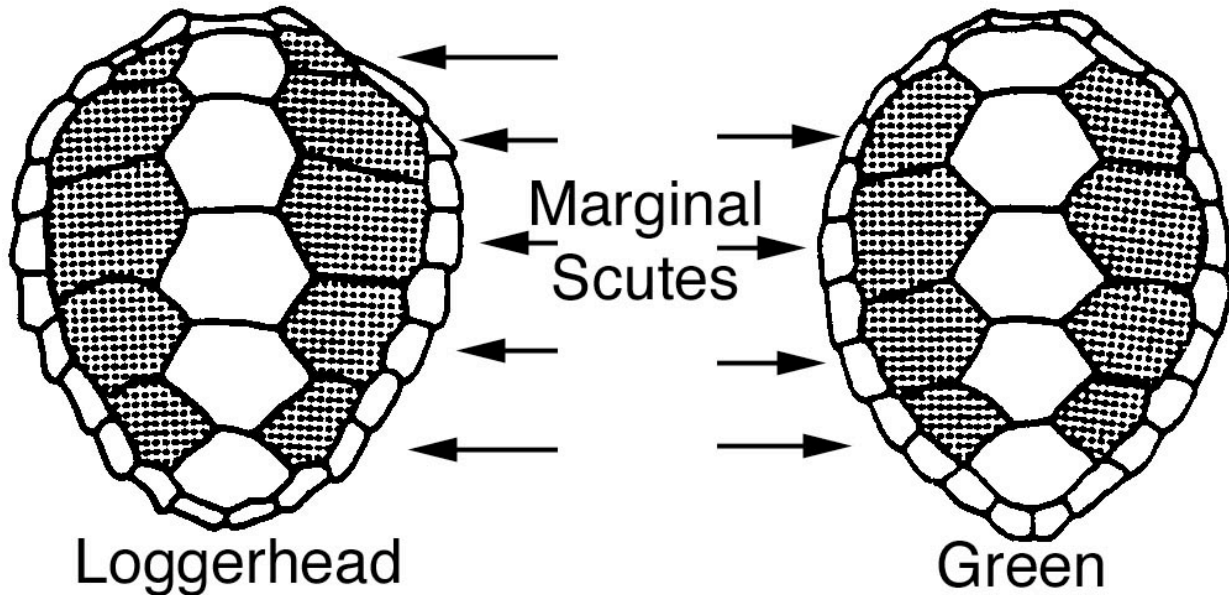




Department of Planning and Natural Resources
Division of Fish and Wildlife
U.S.V.I. Animal Fact Sheet #16

Loggerhead Sea Turtle

Caretta caretta



Background:

The bones of Loggerhead sea turtles have been found in Indian middens on St. Croix, but until recently there have been no reports of live Loggerhead sea turtles in Territorial waters.

The Loggerhead has only recently been positively identified in the USVI. Until 2003 the Southern and Eastern most records of Loggerhead Sea turtles in the United States was Culebra.

In 2003 two Loggerheads were identified on St. Croix. The first, was a turtle that had been attacked by sharks and was found by snorkelers, who called the Division of Fish and Wildlife to see if the turtle needed help. The turtle didn't need any help from us. The second positive identification was of a nesting turtle on Buck Island.

Loggerheads are listed as threatened throughout their range and are protected by Federal as well as Territorial Laws.

Description:

The Loggerhead is the largest of the hard shelled turtles, with adults frequently weighing more than 200 pounds. The Loggerheads look like a cross between Hawksbills and Green turtles. The Beak is blunter than a Hawksbill but pointier than a Green. The shell is not as elongate or the edges as serrate as a Hawksbill, although more so than a Green. It is easy to tell that Loggerheads are not Hawksbills, but more difficult to distinguish them from Greens. The easiest way is to count the marginal scutes on the shell. Loggerheads have 5 scutes and the Greens have 4. The head and neck of the Loggerhead is much larger and heavier than a green of similar size. The Loggerheads have a reddish color to their shell, flippers and neck.

Classification:

Loggerheads belong to the family of marine turtles known as the Cheloniidae, to which the Green and Hawksbill turtles also

belong. The Leatherbacks belong to a different Family, of soft shelled marine turtles. All marine turtles are found within the order Chelonii. Of course like all turtles they are reptiles and are in the Class Reptilia.



Distribution and Habitat:

Loggerheads are not considered a tropical species. They are found in subtropical northern and southern oceans with only a few seen in the tropics. They seasonally migrate both as adults and as juveniles. The juveniles tend to migrate north in the summer to feed in the Chesapeake, Delaware and other coastal bays. They follow a water temperature range between 55° and 84°F. When the water warms up in the summer they will migrate north to the summer feeding grounds, and reverse the migration when the water cools.

North Atlantic hatchlings are thought to be pelagic and live within the North Atlantic gyre for 10-12 years before moving into coastal waters. At this point the turtles become benthic feeders.

Diet:

The Loggerhead eats a wide range of food items, molluscs, crustaceans, fish, and other marine animals and plants have been found in the guts of stranded Loggerhead turtles.

What you can do to help

1. If you see any turtle nesting or hatching events, please write down the date, time and location you saw the turtles then call the Division of Fish and Wildlife at 340-772-1955 (on St. Croix) or 340-775-6762 on St. Thomas/St. John to report the event.
2. Hatchlings can crawl to the water themselves, if you see hatchlings making their way into the water, please let them complete the journey themselves.
3. Please make an extra effort to keep plastic out of the marine environment.
4. Turtles, especially hatchlings, will head toward the brightest light source on the beach. This used to be star and moon light shining on the ocean, but today it may be street or building lights. Turn off lights that shine on and toward the beach, when hatchlings are emerging.
5. Do not take flash pictures or shine lights directly toward the turtles - it will disorient them. Like us, turtle eyes will maintain the ghost image of the flash, only the hatchlings see this as a bright area and will crawl toward it.
6. If hatchlings emerge during the day, please allow them to make their way to the water. You may chase away predators to help them make it to the water.
7. If you see a nesting turtle do not crowd around it and do not harass it. You may observe nesting from a distance by staying behind the front flippers of the turtle. No flash photography.
8. Occasionally turtles will nest during the day. If you see a daytime nesting sea turtle, please call the Division of Fish and Wildlife immediately.
9. For more information on this and other animals in the Virgin Islands please visit our web site at: www.vifishandwildlife.com

THIS PUBLICATION WAS PRODUCED WITH FUNDS
FROM THE WILDLIFE CONSERVATION AND
RESTORATION PROGRAM (WCRP).
FOR MORE INFORMATION ON
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